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SOVIET BLOC AID TO THE DRV:
EVIDENCE OF TOKENISM AND DISSENSION

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1. The Size and Character of Soviet Bloc Aid

In 1965 Soviet Bloc* military and economic assistance to the DRV increased sharply, and is believed to have totalled somewhere in the range of \$200-300 million, by far the larger part of which -- probably 80-90 percent -- was supplied by the USSR. Military assistance, in particular, rose from a previously low annual level to an estimated \$150 million last year. New economic aid extended in 1965, after a two-year lull, amounted to perhaps \$100 million.

More than four-fifths of Soviet military aid deliveries in 1965, by estimated value, consisted of air defense equipment; operational surface-to-air missiles sites, anti-aircraft artillery, and radar equipment. Other major assistance included at least 40-odd military jet aircraft delivered by the USSR and several thousand trucks supplied by the Soviet Bloc, largely by the USSR. The chief contribution of the East European Communist countries in 1965 was an increased supply of medicines and medical equipment, estimated to have been on the order of a couple of million dollars. Last year these countries also provided the DRV with a few million dollars in small arms and ammunition.

* The term "Soviet Bloc" is used here for convenience rather than for descriptive precision to lump together the USSR and the following East European Communist countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Rumania.



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New extensions of economic aid grew rapidly in 1965, although the total is believed to have been well below that extended in several of the years prior to 1962. Relatively little is known about the composition of last year's aid. The evidence available, however, suggests that it may have consisted in large part of materials and equipment made necessary by the war, such as those needed to restore and maintain transport, power, and major industrial capacity. In addition it is believed that more than a thousand Soviet Bloc technical personnel, probably four-fifths of whom were from the USSR, were assigned to duty in the DRV during the year. Moreover three countries -- the USSR, Hungary, and Rumania -- formally agreed to defer repayment on certain debts owed them by the DRV.

Assistance to North Vietnam in 1965, unlike that in any previous year, included commitments by every country in the Soviet Bloc. This broader participation of the Bloc in assisting the DRV reflects the growing pressure on these countries to give tangible proof of their support for North Vietnam's military effort against the United States. Although the Bloc countries substantially raised the level of their commitment to the DRV last year, the total value of their assistance was nonetheless small in terms of their individual and joint aid capability. In 1965, for example, the Soviet Union supplied the less developed countries of the Free World with more than twice as much military equipment (by estimated value) as it supplied to the DRV in

the same year. Similarly Soviet economic aid extended to the Free World in 1965 was about twice that which the USSR is believed to have extended to North Vietnam. The East European countries, which extended only token quantities of economic aid to the DRV in 1965, extended some \$500 million in such aid to the Free World's developing countries during the same period.

2. Tokenism and Dissension

Since mid-1965 officials of the DRV have made a number of statements that could be interpreted as suggesting that Hanoi may have wanted more support than it was getting from the Soviet Bloc. Moreover some of the Soviet Bloc's leaders have appeared to be at pains to justify the extent of their assistance to North Vietnam.

DRV officials have, on almost every occasion, expressed appreciation for the aid received. After the conclusion of talks with the Russians in December, for example, the DRV delegation "warmly thanked" them for "this valuable and effective assistance to the development of the economy and consolidation of the national defense potential of the DRV." 1/ The DRV's leaders have nevertheless given what appear to be veiled hints on the inadequacy of Bloc assistance. In July, for example, the DRV ambassador to the USSR, gave a speech in Moscow in which he conveyed thanks for past aid, and expressed confidence that

1/ See Appendix II for other DRV statements of gratitude for Bloc aid.

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the USSR "will continue to accord still more active and consistent support and aid." The DRV's CP First Secretary, LeDuan, speaking to a visiting Party delegation from Hungary last October said, "much help, including aid in arms, is needed," then added that the DRV "got very much of this" from the USSR, China, and other socialist countries. In Ho Chi Minh's 24 January open letter to all Communist countries, he stated that, given the intensified US aggression, he firmly believed that these countries would "extend increased support and assistance to the just struggle" of the DRV.

A number of East European leaders have attempted to justify the low level of their material aid to North Vietnam by relating it to their countries' limited economic capabilities. Last summer President Dobi of Hungary asserted in several speeches that his country was providing the DRV with "every moral, political, and material support", "within our modest capabilities." An identical line was taken by the Bulgarian Party First Secretary, Zhivkov. 2/

Both Soviet and East European officials have called attention to the difficulties involved in organizing, coordinating, and supplying foreign aid to North Vietnam. Although much of this comment is thinly-disguised criticism of Chinese "obstructionism", discussed below, at least part of it appears to be unrelated to the polemic with China.

2/ More extensive source references for this section appear in the Appendix.I.

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For example the head of a high-level Hungarian party delegation said, upon returning from the DRV, that the group had sought ways to make Hungary's assistance "more organized and more effective", and that this could be done in the future "with the more precise knowledge of the requirements of the Vietnamese comrades." Soviet officials, too, have hinted at the enormity of the logistics problem involved in aiding the DRV. A further difficulty, perhaps more invented than real, was suggested by East Germany's Gerhart Eisler, who was asked why the GDR had not assigned skilled technical personnel to assist North Vietnam's industry. Eisler answered that East Germany was sending people to the DRV who could be useful, and noted that "there is no point in our sending people who probably would not be able to work successfully under the climatic conditions there."

In the spring of 1965 there were indications of a sharp Sino-Soviet dissension concerning the flow of Soviet aid through China to the DRV. In July a Soviet official visiting Outer Mongolia accused "countries with common borders" of hindering the flow "even of military equipment" to North Vietnam. 3/ These charges were made more explicit in November, when Pravda contained the assertion that Bloc aid "would have been more effective if the CCP leadership had not given up unity of action." A Polish military spokesman in December accused the Chinese

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of "torpedoing all the attempts of the socialist camp to coordinate aid to the DRV."

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and the DRV, however, denied that Bloc deliveries had been obstructed; indeed, Pham Van Dong took the occasion of Shelepin's visit to Hanoi to state that the "aid of the USSR and other socialist nations has been transported to the DRV according to plan."

In late December the Chinese again publicly assailed the objectives of Soviet aid, and disparaged its quality and size. The Russians were said to be aiding the DRV in order to gain the leverage necessary "to strike a political deal with the United States"; but the aid supplied "has consisted in large part of obsolete equipment discarded by the Soviet armed forces, or damaged weapons cleaned out from the warehouse." The Chinese further asserted that the Soviet goods they have transported to Vietnam were far from commensurate with Soviet strength, and should be "a hundred times greater." 4/

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The USSR's response to such charges has been to continue asserting its intention to provide North Vietnam with "all necessary assistance" and, more recently, to identify some of the assistance extended. In November, for example, -- some five months after the fact -- the USSR acknowledged its role in supplying the DRV with SAM sites. Shelepin, responding to Chinese charges that the USSR was capitulating to imperialism at every opportunity, perhaps was indirectly referring to limited aid to the DRV during a January speech in Hanoi, when he spoke of the USSR's obligations throughout the world, and noted that Soviet military strength "is a prop to all progressive forces in the world." He also referred indirectly to the internal needs of the Soviet economy, pointing out that the further economic growth of the USSR "meets the essential interests of all revolutionary forces." 5/

East European officials generally have not made extravagant claims regarding the scale of their material aid to the DRV; indeed, East European propaganda has tended to avoid giving information on concrete state-to-state aid commitments, and instead has stressed the moral and allegedly popular support given to the North Vietnamese people in their struggle.

Some of the factors that may be responsible for the Soviet Bloc's failure to commit more resources to the DRV are discussed below.

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3. Rationale for a Limited Commitment

Although no Communist official has yet admitted publicly that the war in Vietnam is anything other than a vital cause for every member of the Communist camp, the evidence discussed above suggests that, in fact, the Bloc so far has made only a limited commitment of resources in support of the North Vietnamese. The level of the commitment seems to reflect a general Soviet Bloc policy of restraint vis-a-vis the war in Vietnam -- a restraint based on several related fears on the part of the Russian and East European Leaders.

There appears to be first of all a general reluctance to involve their countries more deeply in a distant and unpopular war from which they stand to gain nothing. Such a realistic appraisal cannot, however, be publicly voiced, because each Bloc country must maintain the pretense of solidarity with the DRV.

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An indirect hint that aid to the DRV has less than the full support of Hungary's people was given in a speech by Jenos Fock, who said, "Everyone is mistaken who assumes that in the question of

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assistance, the Hungarian working people are in disagreement with the government."

Closely linked to this reluctance to become further involved in supporting North Vietnam is the concern of Soviet Bloc regimes over their own countries' generally unimpressive economic growth. In spite of the cries of Bloc leaders, however, that their aid resources are being stretched, the token assistance so far provided the DRV seems hardly enough to cause any noticeable disruption in the economic life of the Bloc. A more legitimate concern is the future claim that the DRV might make on Bloc resources, particularly in the event of a rapid escalation of the war.

The Soviet and East European regimes have even more vital reasons to fear escalation of the conflict. For the USSR, escalation could lead to a dangerous confrontation with the United States -- a development which the Soviet leaders appear eager to avoid. 7/ The Bloc's leaders also are aware that escalation might lead the DRV ultimately to seek Chinese intervention, which would be almost wholly inimical to Soviet and East European policy objectives, both in the Communist camp and in the Free World.

There is also evidence that the East European regimes realize that the Vietnam issue is currently jeopardizing their chances to gain more favorable economic and other relations with the USA. Moreover should the war be intensified to a degree compelling these countries to make a

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really heavy military commitment in Vietnam, they would be jeopardizing their flourishing economic ties with US allies in Western Europe -- an area of far greater importance than the USA to Eastern Europe's major economic objectives. This may well be only a minor consideration in Eastern Europe's Vietnam policy; it is largely through improved economic relations with Western Europe, however, that Eastern Europe can hope to overcome its technological backwardness and to modernize its industrial structure. Credits, licensing arrangements, joint industrial ventures, removal of trade barriers, package trade deals -- all these significant benefits that Eastern Europe has begun to enjoy during the past several years could be quickly nullified by a serious acceleration of the war in Vietnam. 8/

The Bloc's limited commitment may also reflect in part the DRV's limited capacity to absorb material aid, particularly complex modern weaponry. Offers of certain other kinds of aid, including specific types of East European capital equipment that the North Vietnamese felt unable to install in good time, apparently have been declined by the DRV. 9/ That North Vietnam has wanted additional assistance, however, is indicated by the DRV aid-seeking missions throughout the Sino-Soviet camp in late 1965 and early 1966, within six months of the preceding series of aid agreements. From this second

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round of talks the North Vietnamese obtained additional apparently small commitments of both financial and material assistance.

(See Appendix III). It is quite possible that the results of US bombing in 1965 led to the need for additional material help.

Whatever may have prompted the second mission, it suggests that the Bloc's aid to the DRV is of a limited, ad hoc nature, and not a coordinated, long-range program. As noted earlier in this paper, the public appeals by North Vietnamese officials for additional aid, as well as the apologetic line taken by some Soviet Bloc nations concerning the volume of assistance being provided, further suggest that a gap may exist between DRV expectations and the Bloc's commitment so far. The precise nature of this gap -- if, indeed, it does exist -- is not known. It is possible that the focus of apparent DRV concern over aid lies more in the future than in the past; that North Vietnam's leaders have sought assurances that an escalation in the level of fighting will bring forth a corresponding increase in the level of Bloc assistance. There are no indications, however, that these assurances have been met.

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APPENDIX I

Official East European Statements on Aid to the DRV*

BULGARIA

Zhivkov speech at friendship rally for visiting Ceausescu on 17 September 1965:

True to the socialist internationalism, the Bulgarian People's Republic has rendered and will also render in the future moral, economic, and other help to the heroic Vietnamese people.

UN Delegate Tarabanov at UNGA, 15 October 1965:

Guided by its policy of full support to the struggle of the peoples against imperialism and colonialism, the Bulgarian Government firmly supports the just cause of the Vietnamese people and offers them assistance according to its capabilities.

Zhivkov speech commissioning a plant, 21 December 1965:

The Bulgarian People's Republic renders help to the peoples struggling against colonialism for their liberation and helps, according to its possibilities, those liberated countries which have not yet attained their complete national independence. We are decided, dear comrades, to render all possible help to the struggling Vietnamese people and we are deeply convinced that their just struggle will be successful. . . .

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

28 October 1965 Novotny on nationalization day

We condemn the warlike violent actions of the Americans and we shall continue to help the Vietnamese people in their fight.

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APPENDIX I
(Continued)GDR

NEUES DEUTSCHLAND item of 2 December 1965 says on 1 December 5,000 bicycles valued at 1 million d. marks given to the DRV Ambassador and the NPLSV mission head; "the most valuable donation of the GDR people to the VN people to date."

Eisler answers listener's questions, East Berlin domestic radio, 28 November 1965:

Question: Why do we not aid the DRV by sending people with appropriate vocations to that country's industry so that the DRV people concerned can make themselves free for the defense of their country?

Prof. Gerhart Eisler: The DRV has enough people to manage its industry. There is no point in our sending people to the DRV who probably would not be able to work successfully under the climatic conditions there. We are sending people there who can be useful, and if the DRV Government deemed it expedient that we send more people, we would do so.

HUNGARY

MTI report that Dobi received new DRV Ambassador Hoang Luong; 20 July 1965:

[quoting President Dobi] Our government fulfills the demand and will of our people when, within the scope of our capabilities, it gives every moral, political, and material support to the Vietnamese people's just fight.

Dobi speech on occasion of Constitution Day, 22 August 1965:

We view with respect and sympathy the admirable struggle for freedom of the Vietnamese people to which the socialist camp countries, among them Hungary in accordance with its modest possibilities, are giving all possible assistance.

Budapest domestic account on 5 November 1965 of Jeno Fock's report on his Far East trip:

As a party delegation, it was not our objective to conduct economic negotiations. Nevertheless we exchanged views on economic topics,

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I believe usefully. I have already mentioned that we wish to make more organized and more effective our current and future assistance of various kinds. I feel that we have succeeded in that as well. With more precise knowledge of the requirements of the Vietnamese comrades, we can in the future give more systematic and effective aid. Our political and diplomatic activity could also become broader and more fruitful by use of aid to Vietnam, since we now know better the attitude of the Vietnamese comrades and the reasons behind it.

Kadar new year interview by NEPSZABADSAG and MTI, 31 December 1965:

. . . every socialist country has assured our fighting Vietnamese brethren of its solidarity and is helping them. But it would be even better if all of this was done in greater unity and was better coordinated.

MTI account of Jenő Fock address at chemical works, 29 November 1965:

We must press home to the U.S. imperialists and those who support them that we indeed help our Vietnamese brethren in every possible way. Everybody is mistaken who assumes that in the question of assistance, the Hungarian working people are in disagreement with the government. The Hungarian workers are urging the leaders--and this is common knowledge here at home--that we should send even more aid, even greater military aid, even more modern weapons to Vietnam; and we will do this until our Vietnamese brethren can expel the American intruders.

Lajos Mehes, first secretary of the Hungarian youth league, on 1 November 1965:

We are proud of the fact that according to its ability Hungary is helping the fighting people of Vietnam both morally and materially.

POLAND

PAP report on visiting NFSLV delegation meeting with Polish Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy--UFFD. Quoting UFFD Deputy Minister Kazimierz Rusinek, 26 October 1965:

Like other socialist countries, the speaker said, Poland gives its moral and material support to this struggle. He recalled

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(Continued)

that the Polish delegation which took part recently in the debates of the PIR bureau in Vienna initiated adoption of a resolution condemning the U.S. aggression in Vietnam. . . .

PAP report on meeting at Polish Committee for Solidarity with Asian and African Nations for visiting NFLSV delegation, 25 October 1965:

The Vietnamese nation, the speaker [Tran Hoai Nam] emphasized, appreciates the moral and material assistance which the Polish Government and nation have been rendering to it for years.

Ignacy Loga-Sowinski speech at meeting marking 20th anniversary of the DRV, in Warsaw, 2 September 1965:

Our solidarity with the Vietnamese people is shared by all socialist countries, whose help and support must tip the scales of the victory of a just cause. On the 20th anniversary of proclamation of the DRV, our hearts beat in the same rhythm.

RUMANIA

SCINVIETIA version of Ceausescu speech at fr meeting in Bulgaria, 17 September 1965:

Our country has given and will continue to give support to the people of the DRV in their heroic struggle.

[note: in his speech in USSR 10 September he used similar language, without indicating giving aid: "Our country has accorded and will in future accord its international support to the heroic struggle by the Vietnamese people."]

APPENDIX II

Selected DRV Statements on Bloc Aid*

MTI report that Dobi received new DRV Ambassador Hoang Luong, 20 July 1965:

Quoting the Ambassador In their fight against the French colonizers, the Vietnamese people received the same support and help from the Hungarian Government and people and the other socialist countries as they are now receiving in the present struggle.

Budapest Arabic-language broadcast account of DRV Ambassador's press conference on occasion of 20th anniversary of DRV independence (31 August 1965):

In conclusion, the Ambassador expressed the thanks of the DRV Government and people of Hungary and other countries which are providing moral and material aid to the Vietnamese people in their struggle for independence and peaceful construction of the country.

VNA report of Giap message to Hungarian Defense Minister on Hungarian Army Day, 29 September 1965:

Officers and men of the Vietnamese People's Army express their sincere gratitude to the Hungarian people and army for their warm support and active assistance to the Vietnamese people and army in their struggle against the U.S. imperialist aggressors

VNA version of General Giap message to Czech Minister of Defense on Czech Army Day (6 October 1965):

The message....expressed sincere thanks to the Czechoslovak people and army for their wholehearted support and assistance given



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(Continued)

to the Vietnamese people and army in the struggle against the U.S. imperialist aggressors to defend national independence with a view to reunifying the country peacefully.

Bucharest domestic report of DRV leaders telegram to Rumanian leaders thanking them for 20th anniversary greetings (23 September 1965):

...the Vietnamese people have always had the devoted support and help of the people and government of the socialist republic of Rumania. We avail ourselves of this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude for this valuable support and help.

DRV-GDR communique on Le Thanh Nghi visit to GDR (NEUES DEUTSCHLAND, 1 January 1966):

On behalf of the Vietnam Workers Party Central Committee and the DRV Government, Comrade Le Thanh Nghi expressed cordial thanks for the help and support, characterized by the spirit of proletarian internationalism, which the SED, the government, and the people of the GDR give to the Vietnamese people in their fight against the American aggressors and for the strengthening and development of the national economy.

NCNA account of remarks by the DRV ambassador to Indonesia, 16 July 1965:

"It is difficult to say whether Soviet assistance will be enough" to meet the "heavy requirements" resulting from an escalation of U.S. military activity.



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APPENDIX III

Credits and Grants Extended to the DRV by the Soviet Bloc*
January 1965-January 1966

In Million US Dollars

Country	Date	Amount	Description
USSR	Feb. 1965	n.a.	Grant: Six fishing boats and an unspecified amount of hospital and medical equipment.
			The agreement also united credits extended in 1960-62, extended the repayment period to a later date, and wiped out interest.
	July 1965	n.a.	For the development of the national economy and strengthening the defensive potential. Provides supplementary assistance in addition to that being given under previously concluded agreements. Of the economic credits 30 percent will go to power stations and transmission lines and 15 percent for the creation of state farms, irrigation and other agricultural needs.
	Dec. 1965	n.a.	Provides supplementary grant aid for 1966, supplementary technical aid, a credit to cover balance of 1965 clearing account and deferred payments during 1966 on earlier extended credits.
	Jan. 1966	n.a.	Provides supplementary aid for the development of the economy and the strengthening of defense.
Bulgaria	June 1965	n.a.	For the rendering of material aid.
	Jan. 1966	n.a.	For the purchase of equipment and rendering of technical aid in the construction of complex projects which will contribute to development of projects which will contribute to development of economy.

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<u>Country</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Description</u>
Czechoslovakia	Jan. 1966	n.a.	A credit for economic aid.
East Germany	June 1965	n.a.	Economic aid.
	Jan. 1966	n.a.	To provide further assistance.
Hungary	June 1965	11.1	Economic aid.
	Dec. 1965	n.a.	Provides for a further long-term and interest-free loan and economic aid of a different nature; also postpones the repayment of earlier loans.
Poland	June 1965	n.a.	Economic assistance.
	Jan. 1966	n.a.	A credit.
Rumania	May 1965	n.a.	Economic aid.
	Jan. 1966	n.a.	A credit. Also deferred the repayment of certain credits previously extended.

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